

Malaysia detains former army chief in bribery probe

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian anti-graft authorities detained a former army chief and four others on Wednesday in an investigation into alleged bribery involving military procurement contracts.

The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission will apply for a court order on Thursday to hold the former army chief and his two wives in custody to assist in the probe, the commission said in a statement late on Wednesday.

It did not name those detained but said they had earlier recorded their statements at the MACC's headquarters. Two others were already being held for further investigation, the commission added.

Former army chief Muhammad Hafizuddeain Jantan is believed to have recorded a statement at the MACC headquarters on Wednesday in connection with the probe, state news agency *Bernama* reported. *Reuters* was unable to independently verify the report.

Muhammad Hafizuddeain was placed on leave in late December pending an investigation after the anti-graft agency raided several firms alleged to be involved in the bribery scheme, and froze six bank accounts belonging to a suspect and their family members.

The MACC seized 2.4 million ringgit (\$591,716) in cash linked to the investigation, state news agency *Bernama* reported on Wednesday.

The cash was seized when an individual connected to the case was caught trying to transfer it to another location, MACC chief commissioner Azam Baki told *Bernama*.—*Reuters*

Turkish environmental journalist beaten to death

ISTANBUL: A Turkish journalist known for his environmental coverage was beaten to death in a "horrific act of violence", according to an initial forensic report, his lawyer and family said on Thursday.

Hakan Tosun, 50, was found unconscious after being assaulted as he walked home through the streets of Istanbul's Esenyurt district in October.

CCTV footage showed him being attacked by two people, with police confirming the arrest of two men, aged 18 and 24, over the incident. Tosun was rushed to the hospital but later died of his injuries.

"This report documents that the victim was beaten and died after a prolonged and horrific act of violence, which has been evident from the images from the beginning," the family

lawyer, Onur Cingil, said.

"There were several beatings, especially many kicks to the head area, as seen in the images. And the report shows a skull fracture, leading us to conclude that death occurred due to the fatal blows to the head," he said.

"There were fractures in many places on his body, a blow to the skull. This was clearly what we saw in the footage. These were proven in the report," his sister Oznur said.

"To us, the cause of death is clear: the blows he received," she said, saying the prosecutor had requested a more detailed forensic report.

Tosun was known for his coverage and documentary work focusing on the struggle to protect the environment, urban activism, and the fight against gentrification.—*AFP*



TRACTORS are parked in front of the Arc de Triomphe during a demonstration by farmers in Paris.—*AFP*

US withdraws from climate treaty, 66 global bodies

UN climate chief says the president scores 'own goal' with treaty retreat

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw the United States from a bedrock climate treaty was slammed on Thursday by the EU, which vowed to keep tackling the crisis with other nations.

The White House on Wednesday flagged the US exit from 66 global organisations and treaties — roughly half affiliated with the United Nations — it identified as "contrary to the interests of the United States."

Most notable among them is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the parent treaty underpinning all major international climate agreements. The treaty adopted in 1992 is a global pact by nations to cooperate to drive down planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to

the impacts of climate change.

European Union climate chief Wopke Hoekstra said the UNFCCC "underpins global climate action" and brings nations together in the collective fight against the crisis.

"The decision by the world's largest economy and second-largest emitter to retreat from it is regrettable and unfortunate," Hoekstra said in a post on LinkedIn.

"We will unequivocally continue to support international climate research, as the foundation of our understanding and work. We will also continue to work on international climate cooperation." Trump, who has thrown the full weight of his domestic policy behind fossil fuels, has openly scorned the scientific consensus that human activity is warming the planet, deriding climate science as a "hoax."

Treaty retreat

The UN climate chief led a chorus of criticism on Thursday over President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw the United States from a bedrock climate treaty, calling it a "colossal own goal" that will only harm his country.

UNFCCC executive secretary Simon Stiell said Trump's decision would "only harm the US economy, jobs and living standards." "It is a colossal own goal which will leave the US less secure and less prosperous," Stiell said in a statement.

Critics warned that it will further isolate the country on the global stage, noting that the United States would be the only UN member that is not part of the treaty.

The move "is a strategic blunder that gives away American advantage for nothing in return," said David Widawsky, a director of the World Resources Institute think tank.

Fight looms

The UNFCCC was adopted 34 years ago at the Rio Earth Summit and approved by the US Senate during George H.W. Bush's presidency. The US Constitution allows presidents to enter treaties "provided two thirds of Senators present concur," but it is silent on the process for withdrawing from them — a legal ambiguity that could invite court challenges.—*AFP*

French farmers block Paris streets in protest against Mercosur trade deal

PARIS: French farmers blockaded roads into Paris and landmarks like the Arc de Triomphe with tractors on Thursday in protest against a sweeping trade deal the European Union is due to sign with South American nations. Farmers from the right-wing Coordination Rurale union called for the protests in Paris amid fears the planned free trade agreement with the Mercosur bloc will flood the EU with cheap food imports.

They also protested against high costs and excessive local regulation and demanded an end to a government policy of culling herds of cows in response to a highly contagious cattle disease, which they consider excessive.

"We are between resentment and despair. We have a feeling of abandonment, with Mercosur being an example," Stephane Pelletier, a senior member of the Coordination Rurale union, said beneath the Eiffel Tower.

The farmers overran police checkpoints to enter the city, driving along the Champs Elysees avenue and blocking the road around the Arc de Triomphe before dawn, before gathering in front of the National Assembly.

National Assembly President Yael Braun-Pivet was booed and jostled when she stepped outside of the assembly's gates to talk with the Coordination Rurale protesters.

Dozens of tractors obstructed highways leading into the capital ahead of the morning rush hour, including the A13 leading into Paris from the western suburbs and Normandy, causing 150 km of traffic jams, the transport minister said.—*AFP*

West must 'battle' global misinformation, says outgoing BBC chief

LONDON: Britain and its Western allies must counter "bad actors" who are "flooding" global airwaves and online spaces with "misinformation and disinformation", the outgoing head of the *BBC* warned on Thursday.

Tim Davie — who will quit as *BBC* director general when a replacement is found after the scandal over a misleading edit of a Donald Trump speech — urged increased funding for its World Service arm.

Arguing "the stakes in my lifetime have never been higher", Davie said the West faces "a battle for who owns the narrative" against adversaries like China and Russia, with misinformation and disinformation now "utterly rife".

"We have bad actors deliberately trying to affect the mindset of populations domestically and internationally," he told a watchdog panel of UK lawmakers.

"They're predatory, and they're active, and they're investing, and they're playing a very long-term game."

"They are playing over decades to reshape the way people think about the West, the UK," Davie added, calling the World Service "an asset" essential in that fight.—*AFP*

Cambodia extradites alleged 'scam centre' don to China

Phnom Penh to liquidate bank founded by Chen Zhi

PHNOM PENH: Accused scam boss Chen Zhi has been extradited to China from Cambodia, Beijing confirmed on Thursday, after he was indicted by the United States over alleged multibillion-dollar fraud.

Cambodia said earlier on Thursday that the bank founded by Chen, Prince Bank, had also been placed under liquidation.

The bank is a subsidiary of Chen's Prince Holding Group, one of Cambodia's biggest conglomerates,

which Washington alleges has served as a front for "one of Asia's largest transnational criminal organizations".

China's Ministry of Public Security said Chen had been "escorted" back to China from Phnom Penh and lauded the "major achievement in China-Cambodia law enforcement cooperation".

Chinese authorities will soon issue arrest warrants for "the first batch of key members of Chen Zhi's criminal group, and will resolutely apprehend the fugitives", it said in a statement.

The National Bank of Cambodia (NBC), the Southeast Asian country's central bank, said Prince Bank had been placed under liquidation

and "suspended from providing new banking services, including accepting deposits and providing credit".

It said in a statement that auditor Morisonkak MKA has been appointed as liquidator. Prince Bank has about a billion dollars in assets under management, according to its website.

Customers "can withdraw money normally" and borrowers "must continue to fulfill their obligations", the NBC said.

'Building pressure'

Chinese-born Chen was sanctioned by Washington and London in October for directing an alleged cyberfraud run by hundreds of

scammers who trafficked into compounds in Cambodia.

Cambodian authorities said they arrested Chen and two other Chinese nationals and extradited them on Tuesday at China's request.

Chinese courts have sentenced people to death over involvement in scams, including more than a dozen people last year for their involvement in criminal groups with operations in Myanmar's Kokang border region.

The US Justice Department declined to comment on Wednesday.

However, Amnesty International said last year that rights abuses in scam hubs were happening on a "mass scale", and the government's poor response suggested its com-

plicity.

Chen would face up to 40 years in prison if convicted in the United States on wire fraud and money laundering conspiracy charges involving approximately 127,271 bitcoin seized by the United States, worth more than \$11 billion at current prices.

Prince Group has denied the allegations.

Prince Bank and a law firm that stated on the group's behalf in November did not respond immediately to requests for comment.

Former adviser

US prosecutors accused Chen of presiding over compounds in Cambodia where trafficked workers

carried out cryptocurrency fraud schemes that netted billions.

Victims were targeted through "pig butchering" scams — investment schemes that build trust over time before stealing funds.

The operations have caused billions in global losses.

Scam centres across Cambodia, Myanmar, and the region lure foreign nationals — many Chinese — with fake job ads, then force them under threat of violence to commit online fraud.

Amnesty International has identified at least 53 scam compounds in Cambodia alone, where rights groups say criminal networks perpetrate human trafficking, forced labour, torture, and slavery.—*AFP*



GAZA CITY: A Palestinian girl stands in front of a family tent at a camp housing displaced people.—*Reuters*



BRASILIA: President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva shows his veto on a law that proposed reducing sentences for former Brazil president Jair Bolsonaro and others convicted of attempted a coup on Jan 8, 2023, two weeks before Lula's inauguration.—*AFP*



TANGIER (Morocco): A man rides his rented horse as he waits for customers and tourists on the beach.—*Reuters*

NEWSMAKERS



PRESIDENT Donald Trump's impersonator Ryan Chen speaks as his assistant records a video.—*AFP/file*

Viral 'Chinese Trump' wins laughs on both sides of Pacific

CHONGQING: Outstretching his hands in a signature Donald Trump pose, impersonator Ryan Chen mimics the US president's voice and gestures with such accuracy that he has become a social media phenomenon with his funny videos.

The 42-year-old from southwest China does not engage in political satire — a minefield in the country that can lead to account suspension — but has amassed millions of followers across Instagram, TikTok, and Chinese platforms.

"Trump is an endless well that never runs dry, because he draws more online traffic than anyone else on the planet," Chen said in his hometown of Chongqing, which itself has gone viral over its labyrinthine cityscape and spicy food.

During his videos, which are in English with Chinese subtitles, Chen lightheartedly presents Chinese cuisine, customs, cultural differences, jokes with foreigners, and dances to Village People's *YMCA*, one of Trump's trademark stage songs.

And all his clips are peppered with Trump's unmistakable mannerisms and buzzwords like "tremendous" and "amazing". "I'm not into politics, but I think he is a very good entertainer," said Chen of the American president, whom he followed when Trump hosted the reality TV show *The Apprentice*.

"If I imitate him, it's not to make fun of him. It's to get attention," he said in a white cowboy hat.

"With that attention, I can boost my career, as well as promote China and my hometown."

Chen stumbled across his online fame by chance, only taking off in 2025 with Trump's return to the White House.

The fan of *Friends* and *The Big Bang Theory* — who had never visited the United States before this year — started making online videos to teach English as a "back-up plan" from his job in architecture, a sector hit hard by the property crisis in China.—*AFP*



HAMBURG: Bicycles are covered in snow as Germany braces for adverse weather conditions this week, with forecasts predicting snow, storms, and freezing temperatures.—*Reuters*



WASHINGTON: Placards advising "Eat Real Food" greet participants at a conference during which US Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr and Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins announced new nutrition policies.—*Reuters*